

Royal Holloway's catering team serves up a plate full of honours

Catering staff from Royal Holloway, University of London, have scooped four national awards in prestigious industry competitions.

Carol Vallejo, Head Chef at The Hub, the University's largest dining room, won the Chef award in the annual Cost Sector Catering awards, which celebrates excellence in the food service industry across the private and public sectors. Carol's commitment to meeting the growing demand for vegan and vegetarian dishes helped her carry off the trophy.

Meanwhile a team from the dining hall in the Founder's Building won gold at The University Caterers Organisation (TUCO) awards, in the Cook and Serve Challenge. The winning team were: Sous Chef, Gary Smith, Chef de Partie, Richard Bakaity and Conference and Hospitality Shift Leader Diana Comisescu. Additionally, Diana won the award for Best Service.

Another gold award winner in the TUCO competition was second year Media Arts student, Jack Wallis, who carried off the Bar Skills competition. Jack works part-time at a bar in the university.

The team from Founder's had to cook and serve a three course meal, complete with aperitif and wine to a table of four in a restaurant setting within a 90 minute timescale. This included creating a centre piece for the table, menus, sourcing cutlery, serviettes and crockery.

The winning menu was: Tempura battered jackfruit, with pan-fried vegetables, a sapphire salad topped with coconut and lemongrass broth, pan fried chicken wrapped in Parma ham, served with quinoa, glacé vegetables and a chicken reduction, plus a cheese course.

One of the judges commented: "We look for something that excites us as chefs. Something we haven't seen before. It doesn't have to be a complete reinvention of the wheel, but we like to see people have sat down and thought about what they're doing, so that it's not only going to excite us, but it's going to excite customers."

In the Bar Skills competition, Jack had a maximum of five minutes to produce and serve three original cocktails, while demonstrating excellent flavour, knowledge and technique. As a Media Arts student, Jack's cocktails were all inspired by movies and TV shows which have been filmed at Royal Holloway.

His three cocktails were: Blood of a Gentleman, inspired by an episode of Midsomer Murders, Jack's Marvel, inspired by the movie Avengers: Age of Ultron and Adder's Kiss, inspired by Basic Instinct 2.



Jack said: "It was an amazing experience and even more amazing to win. I'm a bit speechless. The pressure was on and it was really exciting to be part of it."

Carol has been Head Chef at The Hub for 12 years and oversees a team who produce a wide range of food, with a strong focus on street food inspired dishes. The daily menu includes Mexican, Sri Lankan, Turkish and Lebanese dishes, as well as stir fries, gourmet burgers and salad bars.

Carol said: "There has been a definite change in the type of food we serve over the years I've worked here. It used to be cottage pies and roasts, but now student tastes are more international. There is also a lot more demand for vegetarian and vegan food, which I really enjoy and we have a vegan/vegetarian bar every day. We offer three or four choices of main course, plus the wok stir-fry, salad and desserts."

Carol added that she started a development kitchen to come up with new ideas and to encourage her 12 strong team to contribute recipes and even incorporates suggestions from students about their favourite food.

Carol was nominated for the award by her line manager Darren Coventry, who said: "I nominated Carol because her approach to food is fresh and exciting. She is forward thinking and innovative and is always looking for new ideas that she can incorporate into her menus. I'm delighted her achievements have been recognised – she's a very deserving winner of the Chef Award."

David Foad, editor of Cost Sector Catering magazine, who run the awards, said: "The judges were hugely impressed by Carol's energy, ideas and the time she's prepared to devote both to her team and to her customers.

"She makes sure her menus, which come with all the excitement of the latest street food trends, still manage to offer students their 5-a-day across a range of meal options. She's able to do this while also mentoring her catering team through training and competition success."

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